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AUTHOR	Briggs, Xavier de Souza
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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines major trends affecting both the nature of urban problems and the shape of much public interest problem-solving in the urban United States. Trends affecting cities and regions include the continued suburbanization of jobs, wealth, and political power; the evolution of a skill-intensive and networked global economy in which competitiveness is ultimately tested at the regional level; the decentralization of governance--including the devolution of key aspects of social policy to states and localities and deeper cultural demands that power be shared, that traditional authority and expertise are illegitimate; the marketization and nonprofitization of public responsibilities; and massive demographic change, in particular, the so-called "graying" and "browning" of America. Beyond a great deal of patience and courage, problem-solving in this context calls for specific civic skills--a reinvention of what de Tocqueville, in his landmark study of democracy in America 150 years ago, termed "the art of combining." Most urgent are the skills needed to confront five broad, recurrent challenges: learning together, organizing and shaping interests, seeking agreement and managing conflict, planning and deciding together, and producing together. (Contains 28 footnotes.) (Author/SM)

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Xavier de Souza Briggs

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COMMUNITY BUILDING: THE NEW (AND OLD) POLITICS OF URBAN PROBLEM-SOLVING IN THE NEW CENTURY

Xavier de Souza Briggs

John F. Kennedy School of Government

Harvard University

Originally presented as a public lecture for the Second Annual Robert C. Wood Visiting Professorship in Public and Urban Affairs at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, September 27, 2000. The Wood Professorship is awarded annually to a "distinguished and thoughtful public figure who links the scholarly pursuits of the academy with the practical problems and policies of the larger society."

COMMUNITY BUILDING: THE NEW (AND OLD) POLITICS OF URBAN PROBLEM-SOLVING IN THE NEW CENTURY

Abstract. The lecture outlines major trends affecting both the nature of urban problems and the shape of much public interest problem-*solving* in urban America. These trends include: the continued suburbanization of jobs, wealth, and political power; the evolution of a skill-intensive and networked global economy in which competitiveness is ultimately tested at the regional level; the decentralization of governance—including the devolution of key aspects of social policy to states and localities and deeper cultural demands that power be shared, that traditional authority and expertise are illegitimate; the "marketization" and nonprofitization of public responsibilities; and massive demographic change, in particular the so-called "graying" and "browning" of America. Beyond a great deal of patience and courage, problem-solving in this context calls for specific civic skills—a re-invention and updating of what de Tocqueville, in his landmark study of democracy in America 150 years ago, termed "the art of combining." Most urgent are the skills needed to confront five (5) broad, recurrent challenges: learning together, organizing and shaping interests, seeking agreement and managing conflict, planning and deciding together, and producing together.

Introduction

Thank you very much for inviting me to present this address. It is a pleasure and a privilege to share these thoughts with you in the symbolic shadow of a truly remarkable man, one whose rigorous thinking and powerful commitment to public service are both a wonderful legacy and an inspiration. To put it in plainer English, I am proud to be associated in any way with Bob Wood's accomplishments and example, at HUD and elsewhere, and also to be associated with the work of a fine university in the mission of public service, and so I thank you for honoring me with this invitation to reflect and learn with all of you.

Before outlining a few main ideas this morning, I want, specifically, to thank the McCormack Institute and its Center for Social Policy for all the preparation that went into this special visit and to commend them on the newly released and very urgent report on Massachusetts' housing affordability crisis, *Situation Critical*. I have had a variety of connections to affordable housing thus far in my career, from the streets of the South Bronx to the halls of HUD and the White House, and I would like to offer some comments on the import of the Center for Social Policy's message—with its new report—in the larger context of making America's cities and regions work for everyone.

Along with that specific task, I want to venture further afield with you and to make some strong claims about what I think community building—an emerging form of locally oriented, collective problem-solving—is and is *not*, about why I think seeing ourselves as "community builders," albeit in many different roles, is so important at the turn of this new century, and about why we should think about this particular form of social problem-solving and community action—on housing and a host of related challenges—as the noblest form of "politics" and democratic renewal in America.

In making that last case to you, I will be rescuing, or taking back, the sullied term "politics," of course. As we are all too often reminded, Americans hate politics, whatever they understand it to be, and they increasingly distrust politicians as well as government. Acknowledging those points, I hope you will join me for the next half hour or so in considering the possibility that "politics" and "noble" do very much belong in the same phrase and that the doing of politics is much too important to be left to those in government or, more narrowly still, to those elected into public office and invested thereby with one important *type* of public trust. In fact, I will argue that thinking hard about the problems and opportunities that surround us at a time of unprecedented social and economic change cannot fail to make us re-consider what we *mean* by "public trust" and what it would mean for *every* type of institution in a society, from block clubs to banks, from churches to colleges, from realtors to civil rights groups, and from community-based nonprofits to enterprising government agencies—what it would mean for all of these and more to develop and exercise a public trust in the public interest.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Here is how I would like to arrive at the claims I previewed a moment ago.

First and foremost, I want to overview briefly some important trends affecting cities and regions in America—and therefore most of our Nation's population and most of its cultural and political life. Some of these will be familiar and some newer to you, and while we may not agree on every detail of the portrait I sketch, it seems to me that no discussion of social problem-solving or of the political action that makes up a key part of that problem-solving is likely to be meaningful or useful in a vacuum. So I'll begin with some big-picture diagnosis of the opportunities and threats posed by some very big, very sweeping, and still evolving trends.

Second, I have been working on a theory of community building as perhaps the most promising and urgent mode of social problem-solving for the society we are becoming. I want to attempt a definition of community building that makes room for markets as well as politics and for creative and determined actors in all three sectors of our society—public, private, and nonprofit or non-governmental. When I say "makes room for," I refer not only to making air time in our discussion for, but also to securing a legitimate place for, politics—the art and science of collectively defining and refining our interests and our institutions of power, of organizing ourselves into communities of citizens and not just of clients or consumers. This task of making room for, or legitimating, the rightful place of "politics"—in the sense in which I will use the word—seems especially urgent to me in the age of Bill Gates, MTV, and Kosovo, an age in which even the phrase "community building" has been expropriated by e-commerce.[1]

We are each and every day confronted with the seemingly fragile symbols of an America at its most hopeful and socially concerned alongside what often seem the more insistent or narcotic symbols of America at its most self-absorbed, consumption-obsessed, and confused by change. We will not be rescued either from the excess of stimulus that life in this America routinely entails, nor from the political and cultural daze that these conflicting symbols generate, by spending more time or money at Amazon.com. By that I mean nothing hostile toward that particular e-tailer, of course. I mean let markets and the Holy Grail of consumer

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[1] See, for example, Amy Jo Kim, *Community Building on the Web: Secret Strategies for Successful On-Line Communities* (Berkeley, CA: Peachpit Press, 2000).

choice make room for politics, collective action, and real *citizen* choices, and let us think together about what that "making room" should mean.

The Trends

Here are five of the most important trends I see affecting cities and regions, the ones shaping or re-shaping space, social relations, and institutions in profoundly important ways and setting the context for local problem-solving in the public interest:

1. *The continued suburbanization of jobs, wealth, and political power in America, not so much abandoning our core cities but fearing them and striking a less-than-square deal with them* — this despite improvements in the economic vitality, safety, and image of cities over the course of the economic expansion.

2. *The evolution of our services-dominated, decentralized, skill-intensive, and networked global economy.* It is an economy powered, yes, by new communication and information management technologies but also one resting on a particular set of political assumptions about how economies can best provide for their societies, assumptions which are coming under renewed scrutiny. The evolution of this global economy involves such basic shifts in the nature of work, economic governance, and productive capacity, such increases in the speed of innovation and forced obsolescence, and such big unanswered questions about social equity, that the most disadvantaged workers and their communities, not to mention the jobless, are likely, for some years to come, to see more threat than opportunity here. But let us consider both.

3. *The devolution or decentralization of governance, not only in the U.S. but in many other parts of the world.* This is one of the principal drivers or "demand sources," if you will, of community building practice. By definition, the more localized, decentralized and even ambiguous authority over public and private purposes is, the more collective problem-solving will be called for, the more strategic alliances will be tried, the more direct stakeholder engagement in problem-solving will be debated, and the more negotiated our interactions with one another will be. Despite what we often hear about "partnership" and collaboration *in place* of confrontation, though, the name of the game is not merely frictionless transactions among efficient problem-solvers who somehow ignore old differences and divides, but rather old-fashioned give and take over <u>where</u> the public interest lies, who gains or loses under particular decisions, over what the <u>rules</u> of the game should be. You can see me hinting at why politics *must* be central to much community building. And why the phenom of "social capital" — the resources for individual and collective action that are stored in norms and networks of connectedness, in the degree of "community" we possess, you might say — why social capital often matters because of, not instead of, political interests and political action. More on that in a moment.

4. *The marketization and nonprofitization of social policy.* This is really a trend in two dimensions: on one hand, calling on private capital and market mechanisms to do good, public-serving things, from housing to health care, from child care to business development; and on the other hand, contracting with private for-profit or not-for-profit organizations to perform many of the functions that government does not wish to

perform or cannot—so the perception goes—perform as well as other types of organizations. There is, it seems to some of us, a powerful and mostly unspoken consensus on the part of America's dominant political actors: first, about the essential efficiency and capacity of the market to provide and, second, about the democratic legitimacy of nonprofits (especially "community-based" ones) to play a leading role in social problem-solving. I will hint at some of my reservations by noting that "nonprofit" is an indicator of tax status, not of sainthood. I care deeply about the nonprofit sector, but in general, I think we should care less about institutional labels and symbols than about proofs of organizational performance and democratic constituency building.

5. *The graying and browning of America.* We are living through both the early stages of an unprecedented boom in the population of our elders, one with which our politics and institutions are only slowly coming to grips, and an immigrant boom—the second great wave of immigration in the two century-plus history of our country, with all the two-way assimilation that implies, i.e., assimilation by America and by the new Americans. We often say that demography is destiny, but what does that mean in the context of local problem-solving? It means that the <u>who</u> of our Nation not only creates important targets for community building work, as needs and opportunities change, but also shapes how the work gets done and how it is perceived by a wide array of "publics" who support matters. Marketing consultants and political pollsters can handle this sharply increased diversity from the keyboard: the Nation is sliced into zillions of lifestyle and ideological niches, organize-able statistically. Community builders have no such "point-and-click" options for making diversity work.

Since my main purpose this morning is not to detail these trends but merely to set up a meaningful discussion of what we can do through and about them—all of us, that is, as community builders—I want to begin merely by tracing the basic implications of each of these five.

First, suburbanization. In this new century, America finds itself confronting the challenges of economic growth, social equity, environmental sustainability, and civic engagement—the so-called "four E's"—in the context of a strikingly dominant, post-war settlement pattern—that of the metropolis, with mostly struggling core cities anchoring regional economies, surrounded by what are typically more affluent, ethnically homogeneous, service-rich, automobile-dependent, and politically powerful suburbs.

As many of you know, the emergence of suburbia was an early and frequent topic of Robert Wood's scholarship and social commentary. But when Wood served at HUD, that agency and other federal agencies were a focus of national hopes for social justice and democratic renewal, Moreover, these hopes were focused largely on our cities. Every major ethnic group in America had a strong identification with city life and city politics. In that era of more activist government, cities were the epicenters of political action, cultural production, and social innovations, such as "community development" in the modern sense.

The urban riots and the Kerner's Commission's dire warnings not withstanding, there was a sense of purpose and of hope about tackling urban problems. And just as importantly, cities and their mayors commanded great respect and power in Washington—indeed were

probably at the peak of their influence. HUD and institutions like it merely reflected and channeled that influence.

The HUD where I was sworn in two years ago was a very different place, and the Washington where I have been working is a different town on this dimension—the geography of clout—than the Washington of urban promise thirty years ago. In today's Washington, it is not only that sense of purpose and hope are ephemeral vis-à-vis the cities and their ills, it is that suburbs and states rule—and often at the direct expense of livable, viable cities.

Beyond such informal observations about clout, how do these patterns make themselves felt in our national political life? Consider that the 1992 Presidential campaigns by the two major parties were the first in American history to focus predominantly on the suburbs and the suburban swing vote; the 1996 campaigns did so even more.

Now 8 in 10 Americans live in metropolitan areas—a number that will surely jump in the new census—but an increasing majority of those (62%) live in suburbs.[2] Cities and rural communities are both losing out relative to suburbs in the competition for investment, jobs, households, and, as the phrase goes, the "knowledge workers" that increasingly drive regional economic competitiveness.

According to HUD, high-tech jobs are growing 30% faster in suburbs than in cities, despite the attractiveness of urban areas and of "clustering" to tech firms. And when the 1990s are compared to the 1980s, population growth in suburbs accelerated relative to that in cities. In some rapidly growing regions, moreover, "successful" suburbs are actually gobbling up rural areas at an alarming rate, developing land at rates several times that of population growth—the essence of "sprawl."

Despite the overall improvements in crime and economic indicators, such as job growth and poverty, in urban areas over the past 7 years, many American regions feature job-rich, employee-starved suburbs in one place, physically and psychologically, and job-poor, worker-rich urban neighborhoods in quite another place.

On the housing front, some observers claim that the middle class is coming back to cities, that immigrant demand is fueling a comeback, that cities are "in" again. Consider, first, though, what the latest numbers truly indicate. And then consider the stakes of the competition for land and housing that is implied, at least in the hottest marketplaces.[3]

It is not clear that the upward trends in demand for urban housing in key metro regions over the course of the current economic expansion reflect any fundamental shift in Americans' settlement preferences and patterns, or in the political and financial capital that accompany those patterns. Rather, we are witnessing the predictable outcome when immigrant newcomers and native-born middle and upper-income urbanites move to urban neighborhoods, strengthen city tax bases and consumer demand, and in the process bid up rents and home prices.

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[2] The data in this paragraph are in *The State of the Cities 2000*, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 2000.

[3] Increased demand for office space and other commercial space are clear in many cities, too, of course. Due to time constraints and the salience of the housing affordability issue in Boston recently, I choose to limit these remarks to residential land use.

These "new" city lovers are young professionals, empty nesters, immigrant strivers, and a handful of others who value the amenities of the city and whose residential choices are not motivated primarily by the concerns for school quality that have been driving most of America's middle and upper income households—along with their financial and political clout—to the suburbs since the end of the second world war.

There are benefits here, to be sure. The newcomers to cities will raise the profile of urban agendas in state houses and sometimes in Congress, and of regional agendas that favor smart urban re-investment, but the stepped-up competition for urban land will pressure displacement, especially in the tightest markets.

The Center for Social Policy's new report is especially significant in this light. Greater Boston's very prosperity is driving rent inflation and other symptoms of a housing crisis, fueling competition for fewer affordable units, and, over the longer run, threatening our regional prosperity itself. That is, beyond a moral and social obligation to tackle the housing crisis, we face a clear economic imperative, for no region can remain competitive on the global stage if it cannot house its productive workforce at affordable levels.

Great world cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore, with vibrant "knowledge economies" analogous to Boston's, owned up to this imperative decades ago. In both cities, *most* housing is somehow subsidized to below market rates. The market alone is not expected to provide adequate supply at acceptable prices in all the right locations.

But to underscore the broader trends, the renewed demand for urban housing, and the related patterns of increased neighborhood affluence and displacement seen in metro regions such as Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco, where markets are especially tight, is appearing alongside the longer-run, bigger-than-the-business-cycle trend of continued outward migration to the suburbs by those with the most choice—primarily middle and upper income households.

Notably, it is primarily the quality-of-life and environmental concerns of that segment of the market and electorate that is fueling the "smart growth" movement still gaining ground in states and localities around the Nation. This movement has been the subject of great interest by community developers and other urban advocates in the past few years and of a range of intriguing policy initiatives, from California to Maryland and many places in between. Smart growth *should* reflect the core wisdom that the fates of city and suburb are inter-twined (and cities may indeed find many friends in the older suburbs facing city-like challenges), but it will not be easy to forge strong political coalitions around this core wisdom, let alone coalitions that can take on controversial work that threatens the short-term interests of suburbanites or the autonomy of their political jurisdictions.[5]

Finally, there is the "gating" of communities. It is not enough anymore to move out of the city; one must be assured that a move out guarantees escape from threats or apparent

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[4] I am grateful to sociologist Barry Wellman of the University of Toronto for the metaphor, which captures well the way many urbanists have long thought about cities in terms of their distinctiveness as settlements.

[5] This realization motivates Myron Orfield's case for regional reform: when in doubt, put together the broadest coalition you can and beat the other side. His *Metropolitics* treats the effort of inner cities and older suburbs (facing city-like problems) in coalition against wealthier, newer suburban areas on such issues as revenue sharing and infrastructure investments.

threats. And the way the market, together with our social structure, legal and political institutions, and a distinctly American cultural design, together *provide* this assurance is through vigilant ownership associations, imposing security gates, restrictive occupancy codes, and the marketing of social homogeneity as the ultimate guarantor of "community." Note that the gated community is the fastest growing residential development type in some of the fastest growing states, such as California, Arizona, and Florida.[6]

One some level, gating is merely the fullest expression of the suburb as an exclusive market choice, exclusionary political choice, and protected lifestyle arrangement. For those able to pay, suburbs promise maximum access to what cities offer with minimal exposure to the threats, financial and social, that cities and life on city streets are perceived to pose. As a final acknowledgment of this, and of suburbanization's insistent hold on the *shape* of our society, consider the following rendering of the suburban ideal:

> *Our property seems to me the most beautiful in the world. It is so close to [our city] that we enjoy all of the advantages of the city, and yet when we come home, we avoid all of the noise and dust.*[7]

You have already guessed that this blunt bit of revelry does not belong to Jane Jacobs or some other lover of all things urban. In fact, it was written in cuneiform, on a clay tablet, as a letter to the King of Persia in 539 B.C. The noisy, dusty city in question is ancient Babylon, and the lesson, of course, is that suburbs are ancient—as old as "urbs"—and that for as long as we human beings have built cities, we have also scorned them and run from them.

Suburbanization means all of these things for who we are politically, where we vote and invest, and how we conceive of ourselves, and the key point for now is that we consider the strategic work of community building in the context of this first insistent trend. Community building, even where firmly neighborhood-based, must have the region and its politics firmly in view. In the end, the resources are in the regional game.

I'll be much briefer about the second trend—the evolution of a very different economy or, should I say, of an economy very new in some respects and quite familiar in others? It is marked by bigger, faster, freer capital flows across all kinds of borders (implying opportunity and threat to local places); by sharply increased demands for skilled workers who can "up-skill" constantly over the course of their working lives; by the proliferation of new kinds of work and, to a much more limited extent so far, of worker organization as well, especially in the urban areas where many low-wage workers are concentrated; by the apparent emergence of the region as the most salient competitive unit on the global stage—so metro Boston can have closer trade ties to South Asia or the European Union markets than to Des Moines or Denver; by firms organized around flatter hierarchies and more far-flung supply chains and strategic alliances; by rapid innovation and forced obsolescence in technology; and,

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[6] See Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States*, Washington, DC: Brookings, 1997.

[7] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, New York: Oxford, 1985.

of course, by the emergence of powerful telecommunications and other new media technologies, including the internet.

There are probably many things about this evolving economy that should concern us as community builders and many that should excite us, too. The trouble is, we are not sure we can see everything that matters yet, let alone put it all in perspective. Let me highlight a few things to watch.

First, not everywhere and not everyone is a part of the new economy. To be sure, we are all affected by it, but many of the places left behind—so far—by the economic expansion in America are those places least connected to new types of businesses or forms of business exchange. So much of the context of community building will relate to getting those on the other side of the economic and digital divide into the new game, into the networks. As many observers have noted, distressed neighborhoods will need to be linked to the economic engines of their regions, and distressed regions will need to be re-fit with the larger national and global marketplace.[8]

Second, if regions do turn out to be the most relevant unit in terms of economic competitiveness, then local action in the public interest—and actions at the state, national, and even international levels to support our work locally—can leverage this. In terms of political economy, the details of each region's own "business plan" to become or to stay competitive will have to be deliberated, negotiated, worked out. This is primarily a leadership and collective problem-solving challenge, not a technical-managerial one, and it is a challenge on which community builders in every sector—public, private, and nonprofit—should focus.[9]

Where should the adaptive investments in workforce, business development, housing, transportation, and community infrastructure go throughout a region? How should the costs and benefits of success be shared? Thorough economic and other *technical* analyses are crucial as *supports* for such high-stakes decisions, but the decisions themselves are the stuff of politics and community engagement in the broadest sense. Put simply, exemplary regional economic leadership will be community building of a social, savvy kind and of the first order. It will not follow simply from well-crafted pie charts or rich studies of sourcing in economic clusters.

Third, the new economy includes leading companies touting public value, not just private value for profit maximization, as a part of their bottom line and concept of competitiveness. Some of this may be enlightenment—a broadening of the concept of what firms are "for" in our society. But some is enlightened self-interest: in the so-called "war for

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[8] One of the few studies of regionalism to explicitly acknowledge that this work is "community building" is Manuel Pastor, Jr., Peter Dreier, J. Eugene Grigsby, and Marta Lopez-Garza, *Regions that Work: How Cities and Suburbs Can Grow Together*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000.

[9] One of the more unprecedented arguments for a "community building style" approach to the urban crisis appeared in the form of a report prepared by Fortune 500-backed business alliance in 1995. Unfortunately, the report prescribed community building primarily in terms of re-weaving the social fabric within distressed inner-city communities, not as the region-wide challenge of forging connections among diverse stakeholders, deliberating, and together designing an economy—and more—with diverse interests in mind. See Committee for Economic Development, *Rebuilding Inner City Communities: A New Approach to the Nation's Urban Crisis*, A Statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, New York: Author, 1995.

talent" that tight labor markets have produced in some sectors, companies that emphasize social concerns – for example by providing employees with flex-time for community involvement or engaging *as firms* in strategic alliances with nonprofits (as Timberland did with CityYear) – seem to outgun companies that do not. These firms attract and retain better people, and this suggests incentives for a greater number of strategic alliances between businesses and nonprofits. The key questions here will be what kinds of partnerships – according to a Harvard Business School study, most are limited cause-related marketing alliances for now – and with what lastir.g public value.[10]

Trend #3. Governance is becoming more decentralized. We have less faith in top-down, expert-dictated solutions driven and implemented by big institutions. Entrepreneurship is in, small is beautiful, users are experts, the grassroots knows better. This is the official line, at any rate.

On the most visible and institutionalized dimension, govern*ment* authority and resource allocation in the U.S., in a range of areas important to social problem-solving – from housing to economic development, public assistance, and more – has been devolved quite dramatically, over the past few decades, from the feds to states and localities. In the case of schooling, we have even seen aggressive, reform-minded devolution from states and districts right down to the schoolhouse and parent-teacher council. And the boom in charter schools reflects this decide-it-at-the-storefront trend in education.

Beyond govern*ment*, though, govern*ance* – the body of decision-making institutions, norms, and processes throughout our society – has been decentralized and, increasingly, must be negotiated. Not only in government but in the private and nonprofit sectors, too, we see a subtle but sure insistence on more stakeholder engagement, more collaboration. We have less faith in linear planning by policy and profit wonks[11], more faith in building out visions together and writing a common story. Management manuals and leadership gurus tout "servant leadership" and facilitative approaches to mobilizing others in common cause.

We want to see institutions that jointly produce outcomes – think for a moment about all the actors in a society that it takes to keep one kid in high school and "on track," from families to schools to youth organizations to businesses and colleges and maybe even media – we want to see these actors linked in powerful, sustainable ways in the form of strategic alliances. In the jargon, we are turning to networks of capacity and flatter arrangements rather than hierarchies.

This decentralization creates opportunities as well as strains.

The opportunities are clearest: more room to fulfill the great promise of democracy though deliberation that is inclusive, more room to ask the customer-citizen what she needs and then respond (closer to the people), more room to develop leadership skills and values throughout a society, with everyone engaged in decisions with real stakes. E-commerce already

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[10] See James Austin, "Strategic Alliances Between Businesses and Nonprofits," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (Summer 2000).

[11] The term "wonk" derives from the word "know" (as in "know-it-all") spelled backward. It connotes one who is subject matter knowledgeable, at least in a formal way, though not necessarily "in touch."

has a label that captures some of this democratization when applied to economic exchange: *mass customization*. The customer rules.

Yet the strains that come with decentralization, again not only in government but in many of the decision-making routines that run the stuff of society at large, are massive and easily overlooked.

There are and will be a wide variety of increased demands that power be shared, that decision-making be made more transparent, that accountability be extended in this era of cheaper-than-ever information management, that real access to decisions with real stakes be given to stakeholders whose input, in the final analysis, is advisory for now. This means anxiety, confusion, resentment, miscommunication, and many, many, many ... *meetings*.

Sharing power is hard, and to focus on the bosses for a moment, most managers (in all three sectors) have not been trained to perform in the context of participatory decision-making. Sometimes the decision-making "table" gets crowded and feels unfamiliar when new places are made, and giving a much wider array of stakeholders in a society the understanding they need to make use of their place at the table is not an overnight project at all. The political autopsies of the Model Cities program, by Bob Wood, Sherry Arnstein, and others bear ample testimony to that. So does the effort to engage the public in the complexities of our Big Dig here in Boston.

Plus, where the traditionally disenfranchised are not organized and armed with information, devolution can be a recipe for local monopolies of power, for the politics of playing favorites.

In addition, coordinating activity and replicating success are *much* harder in a decentralized world of mostly small innovators, flatter hierarchies, and limited faith in experts. Authoritative roles and institutions matter enormously for coordination, conflict resolution, and attention-focusing functions in a society with complex work to plan and do. For now, though, we are operating with relatively few adequate recipes. The good ones are those that update the best of the old ways of defining and deploying authority and mesh them with the new. Thus, there *will* be wasted and duplicative effort, process paralysis in working together, and frustratingly slow learning from one community to another.[12]

I mentioned social capital and politics, and where the 'twain may meet, when I previewed this point about decentralization and decision-making. Specifically, I claimed that social capital often matters because of, not instead of, political interests and political action. By

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[12] Indeed, beyond our ambivalence and confusion about authority, there is the great and problematic myth of localism in America. We think about our cities and communities the way we think about our families – that no one else's could possibly be quite like ours or quite as dysfunctional. In the context of traditional approaches to local civil rights work, which seemed to us to constantly re-invent the wheel, a colleague and I termed this "rampant particularism." Absorbed in the minutiae of fine-tuning case work and programs, we miss the important outlines showing how power and capacity to pursue public purposes are organized across our cities – in strikingly similar ways from one locality to the next. See Xavier de Souza Briggs and Robin Lenhardt, "After the Gavel Falls: Race, Community Politics, and Suburban Housing," Paper presented at the Race and the Suburbs Conference, Harvard Civil Rights Project and Taubman Center for State and Local Government, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, March, 1998.

that I meant that we run the risk sometimes of dressing up old political wine in new social capital bottles or of indulging in what I think of as the social-capital-as-Kumbaya fantasy. Let me close on this decentralization trend with this thought.

Thanks to the work of my colleague Robert Putnam and many others, many of them not in the business of research or teaching, and thanks to a yearning for community that tends to coincide with periods of rapid social and economic change in our country, we are paying renewed attention to how disengaged and disconnected we are from one another. Are we in civic organizations that oblige us to come together and deliberate community concerns face to face? Answer: less and less. Do we volunteer in our communities? Answer: more than citizens of most countries, and mostly through faith institutions, but not as much as we used to. Closer to home, do we even have dinner with our families on a regular basis? No, and often not without the television on. Are we only in internet chat rooms or isolated support groups confronting personal, rather than societal, challenges and talking to people who are mostly like us—i.e., "birds of a feather"—rather than bridging the social divides that can cripple a society? Not yet, but the signs of a drift in those directions are clear.[14]

The evidence is that we have lost and are continuing to lose many traditional habits or patterns of connectedness and civic participation, from the family milieu outward to community and civic organizations, voting, and beyond. Also that social resources, such as those stored in networks, remain very important in the success strategies of people[15], organizations, and even sectors of work[16] but that on the whole, the most disadvantaged people and places exhibit smaller, more frayed, and less resource-rich networks.

Putnam and others are right to argue that we should pay special attention to expanding forms of connectedness or social capital that *bridge* familiar divides, such as race, class, language and culture, and creed. But as we invest in new and stronger relationships, including ones we may feel pose risks for us when we bridge these divides, let us not pretend that we can, for long, check our economic and political interests at the door.

Social capital and "partnership" entail more than smiles, good intent, and feelings of commonality. These "community-creating" things are, ironically, forged and tested in tension—fired in the heat of honest conflict, not false consensus or organized consent. We have real differences in our interests and even in the styles with which we think and speak about those interests, and we must be willing to confront these differences to build genuine community.

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[14] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[15] I have been working with a team of researchers to explore this in the lives of very low-income black and Latino young people and their families whose housing and educational opportunities were the subject of a controversial court-ordered desegregation in Yonkers, New York—for example, in Xavier de Souza Briggs, "Brown Kids in White Suburbs," *Housing Policy Debate* 9(1), 1998. The work includes a review of the research on social capital in the context of high-poverty neighborhoods and of the social and economic life of the poor.

[16] One excellent analysis of social capital as a success driver for an entire sector of problem-solving work is seen in Keyes et al, "Networks and Nonprofits: Opportunities and Challenges in an Era of Devolution," *Housing Policy Debate*, 1996, which focuses on local network arrangements and shared values that help produce affordable housing and community development outputs.

The much-discussed resource of social capital, then, describes the magic of what we can possess and accomplish together. It does not, in itself, describe the pathway through which we can forge the ties we need—including those elusive bridges—nor will social capital eliminate the bumps along the way. We will be looking for common projects and shared decisions with real stakes to them, and we will need to make room for conflict as we work on the same. Most of all, it seems to me, we will need personal courage, patience, and a dose or two of creativity. We will also need particular civic skills, and I want to share my instincts on those later in this address.

Trend #4. The marketization and nonprofitization of social policy. We have laid a foundation for appreciating this by outlining some of the important trends in the economy and in governance. This fourth trend is really about putting the three sectors—public, private, and nonprofit—in a new relationship to one another. It is about who we trust to do the work, especially the public-serving work, of a society.

Government has downsized in America and in many other parts of the world. It has privatized certain functions, thrown them open to true market ownership or relied on non-governmental contractors to do the work that government used to do. This is more than a technical shift or even a "political" shift in the narrow sense of the word. It seems to be a cultural shift: we are, as a country, in love with markets more than ever. Some say that the end of the Cold War and fall of communism proved the ultimate validation of the market as a central organizer of societies.

We want markets to be efficient and wealth-producing and to accomplish important public purposes as a bonus. We have more faith than ever, across partisan lines, in the power as well as the *willingness* of markets to produce and distribute valuable things—even when some of our people cannot afford particularly valuable things, such as "a decent home and a suitable living environment,"[17] that we say everyone should have.

Moreover, we are *exporting* this expansive love of markets, or "market ascendancy," as some term it, all around the world, thanks to a more borderless global economy and the new media. Markets, and the cultural values of individualism and choice that American-style markets celebrate, have a narcotic allure in other societies, as they do in our own.

Our community building work happens in this context, but, ironically, it also happens in a context that enshrines not-for-profit organizations as engines of democracy and as nimble social producers in a world of big-government bureaucracy and rapacious capitalism. I am speaking, in particular, of community-based nonprofit organizations, not of nonprofit lobbying groups, nonprofit intermediary organizations or funders, or national service organizations, such as the American Red Cross, though some of these thoughts may be useful for considering their work as well.

Much of the government privatization I spoke of has entailed contracting with local nonprofit organizations to do the work of government and sometimes to represent the interests of government agencies in communities. Students of the American welfare state and of the

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[17] This phrase derives from the hallmark mandate of the Housing Act of 1949, which called for "a decent home and a suitable living environment" for all Americans.

evolution of the nonprofit sector have noted that the explosive growth of the "third" sector in America, especially since 1960, can be attributed in large measure to this *symbiotic* relationship between government and nonprofit organizations, especially in the area of social services and to a great extent in affordable housing as well. That is, government handed the nonprofit sector a lot of its work and expectations, and so the nonprofit universe exploded in scale, variety, and complexity.

Time permits me to note just two broad concerns about the nonprofitization of much social and urban policy over the past generation. The first is that by emphasizing the role of nonprofits as efficient "producers"—not a bad thing, in and of itself, by any means—we may be taking the democratic "bite" out of an important element of civil society. Government funds and other resources come with obligations. It is tricky for organizations acting as vendors or financial partners of government, private firms, or both to act as agents of social change and political activism as well—even when circumstances seem to demand it, even when these organizations cherish their protest roots, as they often do.

This dilemma can generate role confusion and "mission drift" for organizations with social justice in their stated purposes. Leading philanthropies are concerned enough about this trend to have sponsored a colleague of mine to run a project called "Building Movement into the Nonprofit Sector."[18] The "Call to Renewal" is engaging faith-based and other nonprofit institutions in addressing these issues—renewing, in essence, our social contract as people of one Nation. And there are other signs of a healthy counter-dialogue emerging.

My second broad concern about nonprofitization is also political, at least in part. It is that we not be blinded by organizational labels, nor ideologically wedded to them, but rather ask, "what work can this or that organization do well?" and "if this organization purports to *represent* the disenfranchised, what are the signs that it is actively building a constituency among its stakeholders?" Managing the performance-oriented "production function" of a nonprofit (or any other kind of) organization while meaningfully engaging stakeholders in defining their interests and deliberating strategic decisions is hard. Community organizing institutions have traditionally avoided becoming production enterprises for just this reason: they want constituency building and mobilization to be job one, and they want to do that job consistently well.

I think the community building field will not get stronger without confronting some of the frauds in this domain. This is what I mean when I claim that "not-for-profit" is a tax status, not an indicator of sainthood. At the extreme, there are "poverty pimps," as I learned to call them in the South Bronx—organizations that produce little and build no obvious constituency but rather exploit persistent poverty and political illiteracy in order to win grants, contracts, notoriety, and other goodies. These organizations are modern-day political machines, or patron-client systems, in miniature, and they tarnish the strong record of hardworking nonprofits in our cities.

And then there are organizations which, while honest and reasonably productive, lack the active constituency building needed to renew their base, or democratic claim, in a community. In some instances, such organizations are governed by an ethnic group that is losing its dominant presence in a particular neighborhood, perhaps due to immigration, but is

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[18] Frances Kunreuther of the Hauser Center on Nonprofit Organizations, Harvard University.

hanging onto a proud past and sense of influence by monopolizing the governance of a neighborhood's institutions.

This monopolizing of the reins is not evil, though personal ego and prejudice can surely come into play. Rather, it is the hard drama of ethnic succession that has played itself out in American cities for many, many years. Wave on wave of Italian and Irish immigrant in Boston experienced and contributed to this—the same for New York, Chicago, and other cities where immigrants from abroad, or black in-migrants from the American South, changed the landscape of a place and inevitably displaced, in certain ways, the previous set of newcomers. Some of the West Coast cities—such as Monterey Park in Greater L.A., the so-called "first Chinese-American suburb in America"—are newer to these adaptive challenges, these ethnic baton passings that re-work social and political life. Tensions are evident in those places, but so, too, is progress.[19]

Which leads me to trend #5—the graying and browning of America. The *what* of our challenges as one people, one Nation, and the *how* of our work together on those challenges cannot be divorced from the *who* we are becoming.

The baby boom of the postwar decades, together with improved medical care and (thus) longer life expectancy, are producing an unprecedented elder boom. While America under age 65 tripled in size in the last century, Americans age 65 and over grew in number by a factor of 11. And according to Census Bureau projections, the elderly population will more than double between now and 2050, to 80 million—almost a quarter of those being 85 years or older.

What will this mean for the kinds of homes we build and communities of care we imagine and create? What will it mean for the new inter-generational social contract that provides our elders with the security they have more than earned without starving our young people of the health, education, and other investments we must make on the front side of life? And what will this boom mean for the inter-generational learning we can make possible?

These questions are especially pressing when one considers the changing color of the age pyramid: a large majority, estimated at 8 in 10, of those elderly in the year 2050 will be white, but most young people age 17 or under (54%) will be people of color by then.

Fueling much of this change, of course, is the Nation's second great wave of immigration, which is driving "the browning of America." Between now and 2050, white Americans could go from 72% to 52%, a bare majority, of total population, with Hispanic and Asian Americans gaining most of that change in population share.

You already know that this great wave differs from the last one—that at the turn of the twentieth century—in that today's immigrants are much more likely to be from Asia or Latin America than from Europe. Head from East Boston and Chelsea to Jackson Heights in Queens, from East Little Havana in Miami to Pilsen in Chicago, and from South Portland to Monterey Park in L.A., and there are immigrant entrepreneurs and immigrant civic groups making our

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[19] One of the most vivid and most insightful accounts of feared displacement and of ethnic co-existence in urban neighborhoods is Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1985. A newer rendering, also insightful but focused on Los Angeles, is John Horton, *The Politics of Diversity: Immigration, Resistance, and Change in Monterey Park, California*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

cities and regions more dynamic, immigrant workers often taking the dirtiest jobs with the longest hours and lowest wages, immigrant families representing the key growth market in homeownership and mortgage lending products, and immigrant stakeholders asking for the health, education, and other investments our parents or ancestors wanted—all the while challenging us to build community better than we ever have before.

The new immigrants, like the old, face three basic challenges, and these are *community building* challenges in the broad sense that they are collective projects, not individualist ones, and collective projects, moreover, in which non-immigrants must play important roles: (1) gaining a foothold and performing *economically*; (2) organizing *politically*—witness the new Latino political muscle in Los Angeles, which is set to be transformed; and (3) finding cultural identity in a way that both preserves core traditions and selectively incorporates new symbols and practices, "works" the culture carried with and the cultures encountered, creating new designs.

To the artist, this has an exciting air. I think the community builder in all of us should be excited but sober about the work ahead. We have more and more styles of discourse, which means we value many of the same things but express ourselves in different ways. A few years ago, I pondered this in a piece called "Doing Democracy Up Close: Culture, Power, and Communication in Community Building." My purpose was to show how community planning efforts that emphasized deliberation and brought stakeholders together across lines of race, culture, class, and organization can be exciting as well as confusing, can lead to tremendous feelings of coalition and common cause as well as deep resentment and distrust—depending on how well our differences in expectation and styles of talk are handled.

I am a true believer. I know we can do this work, but more importantly, I know we must do it, and I believe it will mean taking our roles as citizens more seriously than every before in our history and learning new and more creative civic skills, skills for what de Tocqueville so praised in America 150 years ago—what he termed "the art of combining." It is the mother, he added, of all other human arts.[20]

Community Building Defined

And so we come to community building, the art and science of "combining" updated and re-interpreted for our time. What should it mean in the context of the daunting trends we have traced?

Here some preface and then a definition:

- First, it is not clear that community building should belong to any one field of endeavour, whether housing and community development, or public health, education, environmental sustainability, workforce development, or some other. It should be a broadly conceived way of working—in more theoretical terms, a form of collective action in the public interest that suits our times and needs—not a new profession or policy area.
- Second, following on the first, I think community building is about a set of functions that are fulfilled by *systems* of actors, not by one "side" or another of an issue, no matter where the

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[20] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, London: Saunders and Otley, 1835.

moral high ground may lie. Community building can no more be owned or produced by community-based service providers or anti-poverty advocacy groups, or even dedicated public officials *alone* than the work of education can be owned or produced by schools—i.e., without parents, students, employers, media, and others sharing the work, an educated public literally *cannot* be "produced." With a system perspective, then, we need bankers and realtors and other less "usual suspects" to understand community building and to fulfill community building roles in whatever ways they can. With this perspective comes a freedom about who employs the term "community building" and for what ends—a freedom in which there is, without a doubt, promise as well as risk.

- Third, community building ought to be timely and responsive to context—i.e., it should help us, in some fairly clear ways, to work with the trends we have traced and other change-driving forces at work in the society, not simply respond at the micro level to particular *symptoms* of change, such as low wages for the less skilled, the loss of open space to sprawl, devolution that leads to local monopolies of power, or displacement of lower income families in real estate markets.

The term "community building" is largely American in its usage, but the concept, I think, has growing relevance in a world buffeted by shared changes and challenges that transcend national borders and cultural traditions. Let me propose a definition of this term that can "travel," I believe, to many nations and highlight the teachable and learnable aspects of the underlying strategic work. And let me warn that the definition will seem a bit abstract at first; I do not refer to any specific policy problems or "best practice" program solutions. I have learned from a wealth of more applied definitions, especially those rooted in community development, community organizing, and neighborhood-level social service delivery as practiced in the U.S.[21] But bear with me; I am concerned today with fundamental aspects of social process and political strategy and how to practice *them* in the changing society we have been discussing.

Abstracting has a value for breaking new paths, opening up new conversations, revisiting old dilemmas, but it strains us, too. As I outline this definition, therefore, I invite you to think about a concrete arena of work in which you play or want to play some role at solving a social problem together with other actors who have a stake in that work. Consider this definition against the demands of the work you have in mind and of the roles you and others seek to play in that work:

> ***Community building*** refers to locally focused approaches to collective problem-solving that aim to solve public problems and to promote socially valuable forms of connectedness, sustained stakeholder engagement, a sense of common purpose, and greater institutional capacity.

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[21] Two must-reads are: Joan Walsh, *Stories of Renewal: Community Building in America*, New York, The Rockefeller Foundation, 1997; and G. Thomas Kingsley, Joseph B. McNeely, and James O. Gibson, *Community Building: Coming of Age*, Washington, DC, Urban Institute, August 1997.

Several aspects of this definition are worth elaborating—in particular, localism, collectiveness, publicness, engagement, and institutional capacity.

First, the approaches I focus on are distinguished by *locally focused* interactions among interested stakeholders, especially local stakeholders. Localities are where the primary stakeholders live and work and where much of the art of "combining," in de Tocqueville's words, is seen and put to the test. It is also where the most important operational work—whether producing housing units or training out-of-school youth—succeeds or fails. It is not that I am unconcerned with all of the "upstream" arrangements that matter, such as federal policy or decisions by international economic organizations. It is, rather, that I see a need to distinguish the locus of community building—where the ultimate stakes and relationships are centered, and that's local—from the more global level of problem-solving generally. Despite all the information-age hype, place still matters, localism matters, and community building acknowledges and works with that fact.[23]

One implication of localism is that interactions in the context of community building tend to be repeated among actors and that the actors tend to be engaged around multiple bargains; they have various "pieces of business" with one another, often at the same time.[24] This means that relationships and reputation can loom large, that few deals made are "one-off" in nature, and that most deals are linked to other deals. So if I'm a banker community builder, my deal-making with the community group and city hall today are carried out with the longer-run and the next 5 deals in mind: will I gain some leverage long-run if I give a little now? Win or lose reputation points? Each of the other actors in the system faces the same set of questions, whether the problem-solvers are interacting face-to-face, on-line, or through other modes.[25]

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[22] See Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyber Place: The Rise of Networked Individualism," Unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, May 2000; and Barry Wellman, "Networks as Personal Communities," in *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, Barry Wellman and S.D. Berkowitz, eds., New York: Cambridge, 1988.

[23] Sociologists have paid particular attention to the changing functions of place in modern life. See, for example: Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Volume I in *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996; and Barry Wellman, "Physical Place and Cyber Place: The Rise of Networked Individualism," Unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, May 2000 (forthcoming, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research).

[24] The smaller the "community," the more likely it is that the actors will also relate to each other in several different roles—e.g., as neighbors, parents at a local school, members of the same faith or faith-based institution, and professionals with organizational interests. In network terms, the smaller the community, the more likely it is that relations are *multi-plex*, with all the benefits and complications implied by such many-layered relations.

[25] As another aspect of localism, face-to-face interactions are typically some part of the problem-solving even if interaction by phone, on-line, and through other media are also important for establishing trust and getting results together. Meanings and identities constructed locally and interpersonally are part of the texture; this is part of what we imply when we speak of "sense of community" and "finding identity" in a community of actors. Recent research has considered a number of important issues here: (a) how multiple modes of interaction, including new media modes, undermine or complement one another; (b) whether trust, or certain types of trust, can be built through particular modes as opposed to others; and (c) whether the internet and other technologies allow for new dimensions of community

These structural features are among the most powerful, recurrent, and context-independent in community building practice: the basics obtain whether I am working in Boston, Biloxi, or Barcelona.

My emphasis on local focus does not imply that community building is limited to what happens in spatial neighborhoods, despite the role of neighborhood-level interventions over the years in generating practices and highlighting the important stakes of the work. To the contrary, community building that targets particular neighborhoods—or "barrios" or "districts," depending on where in the world you work—must happen in and *around* those places to mature and be of significant value. The reason is simple, though the work is not: those places are embedded in larger systems of politics, power, cultural life, and economic exchange that shape the places we worry about most in profound ways. This is what we refer to when we speak of getting low-income neighborhoods, for example, "connected" to important external resources and interests. And of forcing lofty ideas, such as "regionalism," to ground themselves in concrete, neighborhood-level needs and actions, becoming "community-based" in the process.[26]

Next, the problem-solving is *collective* in that individuals or individual organizations cannot do all of the work or make the key decisions unilaterally. Typically, individual organizations—even large government entities—lack the formal authority; sometimes they have the formal authority, but not the legitimacy to sustain stakeholder support or the capacity to deliver the desired outcomes, if they act unilaterally. With multiple actors come additional capacity but also additional demands and habits and assumptions which may conflict. Implicit here is the notion of interests, which drive both competition and cooperation among actors. Community building is rarely about consensus on all matters among all actors involved. In fact, conflict can be a creative force, as long as it is managed within certain bounds.

The definition includes a reference to *"public problems"* to remind us that the problem-solving work, while it is a process and not an endpoint, has a clear orientation—namely, toward the public interest and public purposes. These purposes are defined in a wide variety of ways by various fields in various places—a community-wide need for drinkable water in a Malian village, a region-wide need for skilled workers matched with good jobs in Greater Boston—but the overall point is that there is purposiveness (with more than pure relationship building at stake) and even a pro-social normative agenda of some kind.

Community building is more than creating relationships that were not there before, and it is not a value-free science of frictionless problem-solving among disinterested social cogs. Drawing boundaries around the essential public purposes, and in particular the most urgent social inequality concerns of community builders, is therefore an important act. If e-tailers find it useful to think of community building in terms of consumer-to-consumer (C2C) exchanges and creating an on-line "sense of community" so that notoriously fickle e-shoppers will favor

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organizing, citizen input, and interactive government that are important for public problem-solving.

[26] Some use the term "community-based regionalism" to distinguish such grounded work from more top-down, government-centric renderings of regional problem-solving. See reports by PolicyLink (Oakland, CA), and Pastor et al., *Regions that Work*.

certain websites with their time and dollars, fine. But profit interests are not sufficient to encompass what we mean by "community building" here.

Next, *connectedness*. As we have noted, norms and relationships of trust and reciprocity—sometimes labeled "social capital"—are important resources for action. Beyond the task of tackling societal ills *per se*, community building approaches value *particular* forms of connectedness (or social capital) among people and institutions—not all forms. Think about Mafia crime networks or youth gangs, which are, for their own purposes, rich in social capital. We do not think of community building as the things those institutions do to further their private ends, especially when those ends are achieved at such distressing costs to the larger society.

Beyond connectedness as a general principle, though, we also recognize a particularly powerful place for capable, enduring, creative *institutions*, within and among which so much collective, interest-based activity gets organized in society, so much productive work done or undone, so many rule-creating decisions rendered, and so many meaningful "connections" brokered. Community building without ever-stronger institutions is little more than a series of voluntaristic campaigns. In particular, we care about the capacity of institutions—community-engaged universities such as this one being one important set—to actively build constituencies, define and perform socially valuable work, and join with other institutions in the same never-ending tasks.

In the final analysis, we have only three options where institutions and institutional capacity are concerned: (1) we can create new institutions to carry out important work in the public interest, but this often demands huge investments and creates a certain amount of conflict since resources are scarce and since some institutions have a way of both outliving their original useful purposes and of resisting new ones; (2) building on the latter point, we can "retrofit" existing, respected institutions to do new work, but not all institutions learn well or accommodate different "lines of business" effectively; or (3) we can ask institutions already doing the work in question to do more of it, but this has associated risks, too, since it can create "600-pound gorilla" institutions that seek to own issues and monopolize money, political capital, and other precious resources.

Most local problem-solving I see reflects some hybrid of these three options: just think about the shared work of affordable housing, community economic development, health, and so on, and of how new work, when it comes along, is "allocated" to new and existing institutions in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Each of these options is laden with challenges, and even the most creative, risk-taking local problem-solving has limited room to choose freely among these, since history has endowed communities with particular institutional structures, attachments, and fears. Rarely if ever can those be swept away, though they can and often must be substantially adjusted if vital new institutional arrangements are to be born. This "adjustment" alone is threatening to some—*community building is sometimes subversive.*

Returning to our definition, I mentioned *stakeholder engagement*. Community building aims for sustained and meaningful *engagement* of an array of stakeholders; this usually does not, or does not productively, mean taking a "circus tent" approach—piling in more actors, having more input for the pure sake of inclusiveness.

Traditionally disenfranchised stakeholders—those who rightly feel that policies, programs, plans, and projects often happen to them and not with them or for them—are a central concern of community building. But to pretend that only those interests are at stake—that all relevant stakeholders, say, are low-income people living in particular places—ignores demands for accountability from resource-providing and rule-making institutions that hold a public trust and come under scrutiny for it, the need to structure work in organizations that themselves have interests (including an interest in reputation), and the need for political checks and balances in any democratic society. Community building, then, is about putting a range of key stakeholders in new relationship to each other and advancing a range of interests. It entails advocacy and persuasion on behalf of a range of stakeholder interests, not a simple few, no matter how justly deserving those few.

The Five Challenges

Having told what I think community building is, let me tell you what I think it includes in terms of specific aspects of social action. Here are the five (5) core, recurrent elements or challenges I see as I try to make sense of a wide array of activities here and in other parts of the world:

1. ***Learning together.*** This is a vital element but all too often an invisible, taken-for-granted one. Problem-solving actors must learn together the nature of the work that must be done and how to approach it jointly. This "social learning," or learning in the context of social action, is sometimes, but only sometimes, carried out with the aid of a facilitator of some kind. When we speak of networks and teams as being valuable, it is often for this reason first: that actors in a network or on a team learn together and become more effective in the process—much more so than well-intended but isolated actors.

2. ***Organizing and shaping interests***, including building and mobilizing constituencies and framing shared interests in powerful ways. This element reminds us that community building is not simply about transacting with others where interests are well-defined. Here, then, is democratic renewal, with all the rich possibility and risk and conflict that implies: we can shape each other's interests, enhance our own capacities to deliberate with others, appeal to expanded definitions of interest, discover shared interests by investing in relationships with one another, and help to mobilize stakeholders who have never before defined nor acted on their interests. "Empowerment" in the context of community building refers to that last point mainly, but any set of actors, even elites, may need to be—and often are—"organized" as part of community building;

3. ***Agreement seeking and conflict management***, driven by interests, values, and trust dynamics. Where actors and interests are somewhat defined, they can—and will—bargain with each other around those interests. "Bargaining," which often seems to have the negative connotation of horse trading or opportunism in public interest contexts, turns out to be pervasive and worth mastering. And why not? Again, in a world of more decentralized and diffuse authority, or flatter hierarchies, more of the

things we care about will be negotiated.[27] In simpler terms, bargaining skill is essential to life in a democracy, even when it annoys us, as it sometimes will. What is more, the theory and practice of negotiation and conflict resolution is well-evolved enough to serve as a foundation for other areas of knowledge building and skill building. Negotiation encompasses a powerful core vocabulary—actors, issues, interests, and options—and articulates practical roles for cross-cutting variables, such as relationship, trust, and power. It does not describe all of the terrain, but it does shed light on some of the most pivotal, make-it-or-break-it aspects of community building work;

4. ***Planning and deciding together.*** Developing and sustaining mechanisms for mapping out and organizing ideas about the future and rendering decisions under conditions of shared power. In the spirit of deliberative democracy, this means finding workable recipes for shared planning and governance. "Workable recipes" are those that manage trade-offs among efficiency, inclusiveness, accountability, and other aims. This means avoiding process paralysis, balancing the tensions between simply building relationships and getting tasks completed.[28] These are some of the most visible aspects of community building and also some of the most frustrating and demanding in terms of patience and skill; and

5. ***Producing together.*** Co-producing—mobilizing and deploying productive capacity within and across institutions. This means not simply doing better and more inclusive politics in the form of shared decision-making but leveraging and deploying diverse forms of capacity to perform operational work. When a group of interested actors is really a coalition (political interest and political objective-driven) but thinks itself a collaborative (operationally focused), it if often because of a failure to draw this distinction. Both political and operational "work" are part of the work of community building, but confusing the two can lead to frustrated expectations, false starts, and even damaged relationships and other outcomes;

The bodies of theory relevant to these five elements are rich—from game theory to community and organizational sociology, from learning theory and social psychology to deliberative theory and regime theory in politics. Yet rarely are those roots in theory effectively

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[27] "Things we care about" includes scarce "goods," to be sure—money, political access, guarantees, and such—but also fair rules of engagement. Sometimes, process is the first important item to be negotiated by actors learning a task, beginning to share power, and recognizing the need to produce the outcomes they want together. In the context of negotiation broadly, see points on "negotiating the process" in Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes*, New York: Penguin, 1981.

[28] A simple but powerful insight of decades of research on workgroups (teams) is that most struggle with a tension between *relationship* (wanting to get along and feel a sense of belonging) and *task* (wanting to get things done, operationally). Students of comprehensive community change initiatives in inner-city America have labeled this "the process-product tension" in such initiatives. See *Voices from the Field: Lessons from the Early Work of Comprehensive Community* Initiatives, The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families, New York: Aspen Institute, 1997. Sometimes, process outputs, such as stronger relationships and stored-up goodwill, are even referred to as the "soft products" of collective work.

mined in ways that directly support education and practice, and never have they been synthesized to highlight the dominant features of a broad approach to social problem-solving.

Still, I see new and renewed professions at hand to support these five recurrent elements of community building work. Professional meeting facilitators, negotiation and mediation advisers, and specialists in participatory planning all work parts of this terrain. They bring important conceptual frameworks, often developed in one or more of the bodies of theory I mentioned, and useful tools for supporting group work. Management gurus who can describe meaningful ways to promote shared decision-making by core stakeholders, or provide recipes for high-performance teams across functional areas of an organization or network of organizations, are also part of the professional infrastructure of community building, as are social marketers and community organizers.

Beyond the political and cultural drivers I talked about under trends—forces that favor decentralized decision-making, for example, that lie on the "demand side" of community building practice—these professional niches and associated concepts on the "supply side" have blossomed for a number of reasons. For one thing, advances in cognitive and social psychology have become pervasive in popular discourse and made us more mindful of personal style, group dynamics, interactive problem-solving techniques, dynamics of conflict, and related topics. This is progress, I think, but I wish the "mindfulness" ran wider as well as deeper. Our problems and the changes in our social and economic life seem to demand it.

Closing Thoughts

In closing, I see many of the most urgent and exciting *policy* challenges of our cities and regions, from welfare-to-work to smart growth, from community development and public safety to environmental justice, community-engaged education, and local civil rights work, as community building challenges. I think many of the most innovative efforts to tackle those issues are struggling with the five core challenges I have outlined. I also see many of them struggling with a few common gaps and inconsistencies, for example:

- An enthusiasm for shared decision-making and stakeholder engagement that, in many instances, quickly outpaces both the recipes available to guide those pursuits and the skills and capacities of the actors involved to pursue them effectively.
- As I alluded above, vagueness about the political and operational meanings of "partnership" or "collaboration," including intended roles and powers of the engaged "partners," not to mention a vagueness about the capacity of each partner to meaningful engage in anything worthy of the label "partnership."
- In some localities, evidence of a surplus of alliance building initiatives and institutions with duplicative missions. Related problems include role confusion, muddled expectations, process paralysis, and turf battles.
- What might be called "misplaced localism"—suspicions of outside expertise so deep that that they obscure important patterns, including power and bargaining dynamics and institutional design issues, that recur frequently across local contexts.
- A general disregard for the role of politics—with its images of bare-knuckled conflict, machine-era favoritism, media war insincerity, and "win-lose" debacles—in

> initiatives that promote connectedness and trust, often via messages emphasizing "win-win." This disregard ignores the co-existence of competition and cooperation in most strong communities. It also ignores the fundamental role of interests in motivating human relationships, organizing communities of interest and meaning, and improving human life and democratically defining its value.

If I am at all right that community building, broadly conceived, is at least the most promising *local* approach to solving problems in the public interest, then I am heartened, as I said earlier, by the existence of many foundations on which we can build. But to do the building, it seems to me, and to build a constituency for this work even as we deepen our understanding of what the work is and what it requires, we must be endlessly curious, committed to learning throughout our lives, and, in many instances, oblivious to disciplinary boundaries and other figments of academic formalism or the parochialism of the professions.

Such things restrict us to tiny sandboxes of knowledge and knowingness. To be a community builder, one must think like one, and this means relentlessly pursuing insights across the many domains of knowledge that matter for diagnosing and participating in the complex social processes I have tried to outline above. As a doer, I get excited about the work of community building itself. And as a thinker, I am humbled but also delighted by the learning that this work will generate and demand.

Thank you again for your generous invitation and for your kind attention to these poor thoughts of mine this morning.